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ABSTRACT

Planet Earth is a living organism that preserves and regenerates itself and shares information with humans through sensations, feelings, and actions. After early humans migrated from their tropical origins to colder climates, they developed technologies to impose their tropical memories on their new surroundings and lost touch with their ancient partnerships with the natural world. Today culture's nature-abandoning tendencies train hunger for food into habitual desires for money, land, and material goods; demean inborn nature; create chronic stress in human lives; and through information and technology, separate people from the holistic experience of life. Unlike traditional academics, experiential learning evokes feelings and actions as well as thoughts. To avoid stress and environmental destruction, experiential education must reunite human inner nature with the sentient living Earth. Only when feelings, experiences, and nature synchronize does the human mentality touch the Earth's wisdom and do humans learn that the stress on the land and wildlife is the same stress we suffer. The Audubon Institute, expedition education reverse students' exploitive "tropical" tendencies and teaches them to recognize that the living planet exists inside them, biqlogically and emotionally; to embrace lifestyles and technologies that harmonize with nature; to recognize cooperation and peace as functions of nature; and to confront and subdue their own and others' cultural fears and prejudices against nature. (SV)

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NORTH AMERICAN ASSOCIATION FOR ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION CONFERENCE

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PRESENTATION ABSTRACT

MAKING NATURE'S WISDOM PUBLIC:

THE AFFIRMATION OF PLANET EARTH AS A LIVING ORGANISM

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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Although born and raised in city environments, I've lived the last two decades outdoors. As a resident of these two different settings, environmentally, the forthcoming information age troubles me.

At great personal risk in 1959, I founded and nurtured an outdoor program that grew into today's accredited living earth studies of the National Audubon Society Expedition Institute. Our campus is wild America and its subcultures; our teacher the life experience itself. During all seasons I camp out, sleeping on the ground, sometimes in tents, often under brilliant fall and winter stars. My home of wind, hill and sky reconditions me to its ways.[1] Some say I've been in the woods too long, but our environmental problems state too many of us have not been there long enough.

Scientists claim that my present home, the natural - including geological - lifesystem existed for five billion years before humankinds appearance. Through the eons each entity - sub-atomic

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to continental - desired mutually beneficial survival relationships with other entities. Establishing these relationships created and maintains the global life system. By the time humanity evolved as a species, the planet's matter of itself had long established global life.

By relating and sharing information, the self-organized earth community experientially preserves and regenerates itself. You can sample nature's information process. Hold your breath. The stress you feel building informs; it urges you to breathe, while telling of your physical and emotional connection to air. Suffocation sensations state that just as you need air, the natural world needs your breath. If you become unconscious, your ancient partnerships with nature insist you breathe without you willing it. When you finally inhale or exhale, your joy informs you of nature's presence and power.(2.)

Planet Earth as a Living Organism

In the late 1960's, the natural world for an instant cracked a firmly established wall in my mind. Against all my upbringing, it set me thinking of the planet as a living organism instead of as a Cartesian resource or inert, machine-like Newtonian spaceship. Freed by the wilderness, my curiosity asked: if salts and sediments continually run into the sea (doubling its salt content every 90 million years), why has not the sea a lifeless concentrated salinity as does the Great Salt Lake? Similarly, what informs my body to regulate its salt content from my potato chip intake? As in my body, isn't there a homeostatic wisdom of the planet that sustains proper temperature, oxygen and carbon dioxide content, radioactivity, and proper light for life's existence? Through the Gaia Hypothesis, many scientists now confirm this notion.

My breathing and other inherited biological urges suggest

that I evolved as part of a living entity, not a dead one. Feelings and growth are functions of life. I didn't inherit them from a dead planet, for dead matter neither senses nor grows.

In summary: I find my traditional city upbringing contaminated my mentality by limiting it to habitual Cartesian thinking. Extended living and learning in natural and subcultural settings teaches me that like myself our planet-organism pulsates and senses. The earth is a giant self-organized, warm-blooded cell, a collective ongoing statement of each wild entity's desire to relate, preserve and regenerate itself. The earth organism shares information through sensations, feelings and actions, not through the incomplete abstractions and symbols I was taught.(4)

Origins of Environmental Problems

Scientists tell us that humanity evolved in a tropical, womb-like environment -- probably East Africa. There, more intense consciousness and tool use were early people's major adaptive devices.

Obviously, when these early humans migrated from East Africa into the more northerly four-seasoned environments, they experienced a greater survival stress. Their hairless bodies and cultural habits had evolved to share the supportive East African climate, not the food-scarce temperate winters.

Some migrating groups coped with seasonal challenges nomadically. They moved to warmer places during the winter and to new food areas when they depleted old ones, allowing depleted food areas to renew themselves. Knowledge became an erotic consciousness of what, when and where food and shelter was available. Their lives flowed with nature's sentient callings and events. Because my ubringing and education never taught me their outlooks and rituals, I conclude that these nature-harmonic peoples were not my ancestors.

My ancestors were other East African migrating groups. They pioneered modern civilization by divising a different means for survival. Unlike their counterparts, they didn't learn intimately from their new habitats and flow with seasonal temperatures and food conditions. Instead their memories, myths and feelings intellectually kept alive the womb-like relatively stable and supportive old East African environment of their origin. Unlike their "uncivilized" counterparts, technologically they superimposed their East African memories on their new climatic surroundings and changed that landscape. Instead of joining natural system's ancient ways; they civilized them. They learned to primarily worship their stabilized survival ideas and technologies rather than the more fluctuating and erotic natural world.

For these pre-western cultures the earth's life systems became grist to build artificial East African type environments anywhere. Today western civilization with its powerful symbols, images and technologies alarmingly juggernauts into the natural world. The natural entities and native peoples we pry or blast out of their ancient life partnerships often can't find new partners. They become garbage, pollutants or eradicated.(2) Unfortunately, in our society people who dig wilderness the most have bulldozers.

Stressing Nature

Prenataly and at my birth, I knew only the earth's callings such as hunger, thirst and love. But during my childhood western information instilled in me our culture's nature-abandoning "East African" tendencies. For example, it trained my hunger for food into habitual desires for money, cultivated land, transportation systems, advertizing, food stores, ornate packaging, ovens, refrigerators, silverware and table manners. Carved and conditioned

at home and school, my inborn global consciousness learned to demean nature including itself. I suggest we cause environmental problems by subconsciously treating the natural world as was our inborn nature treated during childhood. Americans excessively feel stress because we learn to think habitually in nature-abandoning ways. This causes our inborn nature to feel abandoned. It responds to that stress with aggression, anxiety, or depression. And because objective science usually excludes our feelings (nature), science becomes part of the stress problem.

Average Americans spend over 95% of their lives indoors. We know the natural world not by our experiences with it, but by information describing it. For example: people discovering the undefinability of life confess to not knowing what life is. Even though they are life, they've learned to know themselves through information and technologies, not experiences and feelings. Until we use holistic processes to reverse our artificial lives' problems, we attempt to solve them with the same information that caused them. It's like drilling a hole in the floor of a leaking boat in order to drain out the water.(3)

The Responsibility of Information

Unlike traditional academics, experiential learning evokes feelings and actions as well as thoughts. That's why experiences are the best teacher. But to avoid stress and habitat destruction, experiential education must reunite our inner nature with the sentient living earth. Only when experiences, feelings and nature synchronize does our mentality touch the earth's wisdom giving us life's regenerative powers. Only then do we learn that the stress on the land and wildlife is the same stress we suffer. Most urgently we must recognize:

1) planet earth as a living organism

2) all feelings originate in nature

3) biologically and emotionally the living planet exists inside ourselves. What happens to it, happens to us and vice versa.

At our Audubon Institute, expedition education reverses our exploitive East African tendencies. It encourages our students to choose acts that:

1) recognize planet earth as a living organism which inhabits us biologically and emotionally.

2) validate our natural sensations, feelings and reverence for life.

3) emanate from conscious decisions to express our natural feelings with respect to the planet organism rather than to our nature-abandoning East African memories.

4) satisfy our natural feelings without excessively using technologies.

5) engage in technologies and lifestyles which harmonize with nature.

6) satisfy our natural survival feelings rather than our acculturated feelings.

7) are based upon choice rather than habit or conditioning.

8) celebrate the natural world within and around us.

9) recognize cooperation and peace as functions of nature.

10) feel comfortable when measured by our long-term effects on nature and humanity.

11) teach us about our shared nature and kinship with planet earth as a living organism.

12) recognize, confront and subdue our cultural fears and prejudices against nature within and without.

13) refute media messages that demean or victimize nature within or without.

14) make life and the landscape sacred.

15) give us security based upon our ability to create good feelings about ourselves as members of the global life community.

16) establish stress resolution settings that identify our nature, emotions and experiences with those of the living planet.

17) establish nature congruent, life-reverent symbols, communities, interpersonal relationships and wilderness experiences.

18) make physical and psychological space and time to reconnect our nature within to the wilderness community.

I and the Audubon Expedition Institute welcome opportunities to establish and support any organization's efforts in these directions. Let's make sure the information age does more than reinforce our inappropriate East African tendencies. Honor our oneness with organism earth by using its voice; make our kinship with the planet known through thoughtful, feelingful acts.

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